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THE ANGELICAL DOCTOR OF SEWANEE

"The unrhetorical character of his theological audacity (without any fireworks he can take the reader's breath away) and the exceptional thoroughness with which he pursues his leading thoughts to the end"—such is J. K. Mozley's characterization of Dr. William Porcher DuBose's Paulinism shot through with Aristotle and bathed in the atmosphere of temperamental Platonism.

When Dr. DuBose yielded up his spirit on August 18, 1918, the Christian world lost the bodily presence of a saint, and Christian theology was bereft of a seer, though his works live after him. Few "took the trouble to understand" him, as he himself used to say. And no wonder: those closely-knit sentences of his seemed like cloud-banks. But there was always lightning playing amidst the clouds. The reader saw the lambent play of electric fire. Hearing no reverberating thunder he might easily think that the misty masses held no force. The lightning was far off from most of us: we saw only its reflection on the horizon. Nevertheless, no serious reader of, say, the *Soteriology of the New Testament* could read it slowly twice—and a great book deserves such treatment as a mere minimum—and fail to face life differently. The far-off beneficent shower has purified the atmosphere. Just so it was with Dr. DuBose's personality. Few knew him well: no one who had met him even casually ever forgot the spiritual presence he had.

In a brief notice like this we cannot hope to characterize successfully Dr. DuBose's message to his age; but we may at least do something to incite a few to persevere in an effort to insinuate themselves into the current of the great soteriologist's thought. For, after all, the worthwhile writers on the doctrine of Salvation are few indeed, and Dr. DuBose's "theological audacity" should become the theological courage of the Church.

First of all, he tried to be a psychologist of the spirit. He saw that Salvation is a process with its own wonderful organic logic, the logic of faith and love and hope, of "righteousness, holiness and life." To him each succeeding stage of spiritual development summed up, applied and carried further and ful-

filled each preceding stage. Like Bergson's Vital Surge, spiritual Life at each moment carries with it all the victories and treasures of the past. And so there is a wonderful Continuity: the End is implicit in the Beginning; the End fulfills all the spiritual purposes and aspirations of all the stages leading to it. Dr. DuBose had nothing to learn from the philosophy of evolution.

His greatest theological *bête noire* was Docetism in all its multifarious forms, including the most "pious." At bottom Docetism makes Christ unreal by stripping His actual humanity from Him. Our theologian had the scientific spirit: he knew that one's theory of God necessarily depended on one's philosophy of man. Hence his insistence on Spiritual Psychology. Make man's real Self great enough; penetrate to the bottom of the saying attributed to Christ, "The scripture saith, Ye are gods," and then one begins to look in the right direction for God: neither at mere Power nor at mere Feeling. Out of Power one may manufacture the Unknowable or some form of the Prussian Junker's "Gott." Out of feeling and sentiment, Mr. H. G. Wells's "good-fellow" God may be arrived at. But the human stuff of Dr. DuBose's God-conception is the upper limit of "Holiness, Righteousness and Life" as seen in the Perfect Man, who *is* God just because *nature* does not make perfect men, and because the Work He did once, and does now, is Perfect Work, Redemptive, Reconciling, Vitalizing. Therefore, since the perfection of human nature is all we know of God, and since it is Divine *function* that constitutes Divinity; and since Jesus performed *the* Divine redemptive function for and in humanity, therefore He was God in the concrete, and shall be so subjectively to each of us in proportion as His Spirit, Holy Spirit, dwells in us.

Whatever the noble audacity of Dr. DuBose's theology, those of us who have soaked ourselves in his thought believe that it is but the reflex of the revelation of Him that came to cast fire upon the earth, and furthermore, that the "audacity" is balanced by the conservatism of the faith once delivered to the saints, and destined to be passed on as a living torch, not a fossil staff. For after all, Dr. DuBose's dominant conceptions are those of

St. Paul: the Adoption of Sons, Justification by Faith, the Indwelling Christ, the Revealing Consummation. Although most of the popular theology of the day tends to emphasize the Incarnation on the one hand, or the Ethics of Jesus on the other, Dr. DuBose puts the Cross in the centre, where the New Testament, especially its greatest thinker, St. Paul, puts it. To the Sewanee theologian, as to St. Mark the earliest Gospel writer and St. Paul the prevailing theologian of apostolic times, Jesus Himself is more important than even his life-giving words. In lieu of further imperfect characterization of our saintly theologian let us allow him to speak for himself. The brief excerpts that follow are taken from the second edition of the *Soteriology of the New Testament* (Longmans, Green and Company, 1906), and are given in the sequence of the book:—

“I have held and hold that His human holiness, as described in the Gospel and interpreted in the Epistles, is not a mere *fact* but an *act*,—of course a lifelong act on His part. The New Testament describes human nature not as having been sanctified *for* Him but as being sanctified *by* Him. He Himself in it is humanly the author of its sanctification, redemption, resurrection, and eternal life” (xii).

“The only essential and permanent miracles of our Lord—if miracles they ought to be called—are those of His person and of His proper work in raising humanity, in Himself and in His Church, from what it was through the Fall to what it has become by His resurrection” (288).

“ . . . The life and death of Jesus Christ contained in it the truth of . . . all the sacrifices and offerings of the Jewish law.

“He was the perfect *sin offering* in that His death, by which I mean not only His physical death, but the whole death of His active and passive obedience, combined and concentrated in itself all the elements of . . . the death of the flesh for sin and of the spirit from sin.

“He was the perfect *burnt offering* in that His life and death was one act of perfect self-consecration, devotion, and service. He laid Himself wholly upon the altar of obedience to God, and was wholly consumed in accomplishing His Father’s will.

“He was the perfect *peace offering*, because in him was realized a perfect human oneness—of spirit, nature, and life—a perfect spiritual union and communion, with God.

"And our Lord was not only these three, but the three in this order. It was only through His perfect self-sacrifice, or crucifixion of the flesh that He was perfect righteousness or obedience, and perfect holiness or spiritual oneness with God" (326 f.).

"To each one of us, and into each one of us, He personally brings the full meaning, spirit, power, and realization of all that He has Himself done and become. In each of us He re-enacts His whole incarnation, saving work, and heavenly exaltation. He so identifies Himself with us, and us with Himself, that, in His grace and our answering faith, all that is true of Him is true of us. In Him *we* are dead, risen, ascended, completed, blessed with *all* spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. Objectively, all this is true of us *already*; as subjectively it *shall be* true in us" (337 f.).

"Because Christ's act has made us sons prior to any act on our part, even our faith; God, through our faith coming after and accepting the grace of God and the fact of our sonship, sheds abroad in our hearts the spirit of His Son and of sons. We love Him because he loved us, not *vice versa*. The fact of sonship precedes and produces the affection of sons, not the affection the fact" (365).

Truly, upon the waters of the spirit of this man brooded the Spirit of God!

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